Visiting Artist

Kent McWilliams, piano

Friday, April 7, 2006 at 8:00 pm

Convocation Hall

Arts Building
University of Alberta

Program

DEPARTMENT OF
MUSIC

Program

Soleil pour piano solo (1990) — Denis Gougeon (b. 1951)

Five Preludes, Op.16 (1895) — Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915)
- No.1 in B Major – Andante
- No.2 in G-Sharp Minor – Allegro
- No.3 in G-Flat Major – Andante cantabile
- No.4 in E-Flat minor – Lento
- No.5 in F-Sharp Major – Allegretto

Sonata for Piano (1962) — Rodion Shchedrin (b. 1932)
- Allegro da Sonata
- Variazioni Polifoniche
- Rondo-Toccata

Intermission

Desperate Measures (Paganini Variations), Op. 48 (1996) — Robert Muczynski (b. 1929)

Four Mazurkas, Op. 24 (1883) — Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849)
- No.1 in G Minor – Lento
- No. 2 in C Major – Allegro non troppo
- No. 3 in A-Flat Major – Moderato con anima
- No. 4 in B-Flat Minor – Moderato

Polonaise in A-Flat Major, Op.53 (1842-1843)

Program Notes

Denis Gougeon's Soleil pour piano solo encompasses a rich thematic vocabulary. The composer presents "Six Solar Themes", which in French creates an interesting play on words. "Six thèmes solaires" is pronounced the same way as "Systèmes solaires. In this work, he portrays various facets of the sun, including the raw energy, the majesty, and the intense heat. The highlight of this piece would have to be considered the exquisitely exotic melody of the middle section. This melody in tremolos is played twice over a scrumptious harmonic texture. The energy of the beginning returns before a final ascent into the infinity of the cosmos.

Alexander Scriabin was born in Moscow, where he studied piano and composition at the Moscow Conservatory. The Five Preludes for Piano, Op.16, date from the first phase of his artistic career. They are strongly influenced by Chopin, but go beyond his romantic predecessor with extra harmonic richness. His works express the widest possible range of emotions, from the most delicate nuance to the fullest of dramatic textures. He was a composer who loved to explore previously unheard musical sensations. Being such an innovator almost caused him to fail his composition class at the Conservatory – it seems that Scriabin's style was somewhat too adventurous for the taste of his professor, Anton Arensky.

Rodion Shchedrin has enjoyed international success as one of Russia's leading composers. Married to the prima ballerina, Maya Plisetskaya, Shchedrin has composed a number of ballets, including "Anna Karenina", "Carmen Suite" and "The Seagull". Other major works include the operas "Not Love Alone" and "Dead Souls", five Piano Concertos, three Symphonies, five Concertos for Orchestra, and the 24 Preludes and Fugues for piano, which present a worthy counterpart to Bach's Well-Tempered Klavier. Perhaps inspired by his affinity for ballet music, Shchedrin opens the first movement of his First Piano Sonata with a frolicking dance character. A second subject soon introduces a more lyrical aspect. The middle movement is an interesting study in counterpoint. After a brief introduction, a five-note motif appears which the composer exploits in various guises, until the music reaches an emotionally charged climax. The final movement starts with a bang (quite literally!!) - this relentless Toccata features a driving rhythmic energy. Near the end, the composer introduces the five-note motif from the second movement as well as the opening subject from first movement, thereby creating fine symmetry in the work as a whole. Throughout this Sonata, the writing is highly dissonant, with a wide variety of textures and an abundance of biting sonorities.

Robert Muczynski was born in Chicago to Polish-American parents and has had an illustrious career, having been nominated for the Pulitzer Prize in 1982 for his "Concerto for Alto Saxophone and Chamber Orchestra" and having been awarded the "Concours International" Prize in Nice, France in 1961 for his "Sonata for Flute and Piano". He recently retired from his position as Composer-in-Residence at the University of Arizona. "Desperate Measures" is a set of twelve variations on the Twenty-Fourth Violin Caprice of Paganini, the same theme used in sets of variations by Liszt, Brahms, Rachmaninov, Lutoslawski and others. Muczynski's superbly crafted piano works use strongly accented patterns, jazzy harmonies and irregular meters to create an irresistible rhythmic drive.

Fryderyk Chopin's Mazurkas and Polonaises represent a unique contribution to Western music, being the first folk-inspired compositions to be written on such a high level of artistry. Chopin did not quote any folk sources directly; instead, he chose to subtly weave the folk elements together with his refined lyricism to create gems of the highest order. The Mazurkas gain inspiration from the characteristics of three distinct Polish dances, the Kujawiak, the Mazurek and the Oberek. The Polonaises draw upon the majestic quality of the stately Polish dance for their rhythmic motivation. Due to the significance of the message they convey, Chopin's Mazurkas and Polonaises have earned the composer the reputation as a national visionary of the Polish spirit. These compositional gems allow us a glimpse into the composer's most intimate musical thoughts, displaying some of his most original and harmonically daring writing.

Notes by K McWilliams

Pianist **Kent McWilliams** has enjoyed a successful performing career since his debut in Rachmaninov's Third Piano Concerto with conductor Kazuhiro Koizumi and the University of Toronto Symphony Orchestra. After a recent appearance as soloist with the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony Orchestra, the music critic exclaimed, "McWilliams' performance of Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No.1 was nothing less than a triumph". He has played in over a dozen countries, and has been an award winner at the competitions of Porto (Portugal), the Regina Symphony, the Canadian Music competitions and the Canadian National Competitive Festival of Music. Kent has three recent CD releases to his credit. As part of the Meridian Trio, he recorded a CD entitled "Triptyque" on the Furiant label; as the pianist for the Niagara Brass Ensemble, he recorded a CD entitled "Brass Feast" on the Echiquier label; as a solo pianist he was part of the 14 disc recording project of "The Celebration Series: A Piano Odyssey" released by Frederick Harris. He has also played frequently for radio, having performed live recitals on the CBC in Canada and the ABC in Australia.

Kent holds a Doctorate of Music in Performance degree, which he completed under Marc Durand at the University of Montreal. He also studied in Poland with Andrzej Jasinski while researching the Polish folk elements in Chopin's Mazurkas and Polonaises. Kent is also graduated from the Stuttgart Musikhochschule in Germany, where he earned an Artist Diploma with highest distinction under pianist Oleg Maisenberg. He completed Bachelor's and Master's degrees in piano performance under Boris Lysenko at the University of Toronto.

Kent joined the faculty of St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota in 2001 as an Assistant Professor of Piano Performance after having previously held teaching positions at Wilfrid Laurier University and at the Glenn Gould Professional School in Toronto. Kent is a very experienced judge and clinician, having been invited to present performance and pedagogy workshops to teachers across North America. He currently resides in Northfield, Minnesota with his wife, Renata and their two children, Patrick and Anna.

Upcoming Events

April
8 Saturday, 8:00 pm
***Happnin'* U of A Jazz Choir**
John McMillan, Director
Admission: $10/stud/sen, $15/adult

9 Sunday, 3:00 pm
University of Alberta Concert Band
Wendy Grasdahl, Director
Admission: $10/stud/sen, $15/adult

9 Sunday, 8:00 pm
University of Alberta
Madrigal Singers Spring Concert
Leonard Ratzlaff, Director
Featuring
Songs of Ariel: Frank Martin
Hesperides: Malcolm Forsyth
with
Nora Bumanis and **Julia Shaw, harp**
All Saints' Anglican Cathedral
10035-103 Street
Admission: $10/stud/sen, $20/adult

10 Monday, 12:00 pm
Noon Hour Organ Recital
A variety of organ repertoire played by students, faculty and guests of the University of Alberta Department of Music
Free admission

10 Monday, 7:30 pm
Grant MacEwan College and University of Alberta Jazz Bands
Raymond Baril and Tom Dust, Directors
John L Haar Theatre, Centre for the Arts, Grant MacEwan College
Admission: $8/stud/sen, $10/adult

18 Tuesday, 8:00 pm
New Music Concert
featuring new works by
U of A Student Composers
Free admission

22 Saturday, 8:00 pm
Music at Convocation Hall I
William Eddins, piano
Jennifer Gerth, clarinet
Martin Riseley, violin
Colin Ryan, cello
Trio for Clarinet, Cello, and Piano: Nino Rota
Miniatures: Benjamin Britten
Contrasts: Béla Bartók
Three Nocturnes: Ernest Bloch
Trio in C Minor, Op 101: Johannes Brahms
Admission: $15/stud/sen, $20/adult

department of Music

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Convocation Hall, Arts Building, University of Alberta
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